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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUNNI ARAB INSIDER WARNS PM MALIKI WILL REIGNITE  
INSURGENCY

REF: BAGHDAD 2708

Classified by Political Minister Counselor Robert Ford for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Tens of thousands of Sunni Arab "Sons of Iraq" and Sahwa ("Awakening") fighters, who were instrumental in pushing Al-Qa'ida out of Anbar Province, and on the defensive elsewhere, will not be absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces and vocational training programs as projected, a senior aide to (Sunni Arab) Vice President Hashimi predicted. Instead, he continued, the GOI, driven by an increasingly overconfident and sectarian-minded circle of advisors around Prime Minister Maliki, will likely arrest hundreds of Sunni Arab SOI and Sahwa commanders, and cast aside thousands of Sunni Arab Sahwa/SOI foot soldiers. This will result in a sharp backlash which will set back the national reconciliation process and could reignite Sunni Arab insurgency, he warned. We report this conversation as a representative example of what our Sunni Arab contacts across the spectrum are worrying about. End summary.

¶2. (C) During an August 26 dinner with emboffs, Saifaldin Abdulrahman, a senior advisor to Vice President Tariq Hashimi, expressed anxiety about the GOI's approach to the Sunni Arab "Awakening" (Sahwa Councils) and former insurgent "Sons of Iraq (SOI). (Comment: The Sahwa and SOI emerged with U.S. encouragement and support in 2006 and are now widely credited with pacifying Al-Anbar, formerly Iraq's most violent province, and putting Al-Qa'ida in Iraq on the defensive all over the country. The Sahwa model started with Sunni Arabs in Anbar province and was later replicated, often with Shi'a, in other parts of the country. End Comment.) Although the GOI has agreed in principle that the Sahwa and SOI fighters should be weaned off U.S. support as coalition forces draw down operations - with some absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and others tracked into vocational/employment programs, Abdulrahman told us he feared the GOI did not intend to implement this process equitably, at least with the Sunni Arab Sahwa and SOI elements.

¶3. (C) To support his contention, Abdulrahman cited the Iraqi Ministry of Defense's "cynical" implementation of the Sahwa integration process in the Abu Ghraib district on the outskirts of western Baghdad. Sahwa and SOI members were told to report for recruitment at a training center in the heart of Shu'la, a neighborhood dominated by the Shi'a extremist Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). The message, Abdulrahman continued, was loud and clear - no Sunnis need apply. The MOD did register the recruitment of hundreds of "Sahwa" young men from Abu Ghraib, but in fact the vast majority were Shi'a youth, he contended. Abdulrahman predicted that, rather than integrate Sunni Arab Sahwa elements into the ISF, the GOI would instead conduct mass arrests of Sahwa commanders, bringing some Sunni Arab youth into the lowest tiers of the ISF, and discarding many others. He was not optimistic that the vocational/employment concepts would be any more

beneficial to Sunni Arab Sahwa youth.

¶4. (C) Reprising a familiar theme (reftel), Abdulrahman believed Prime Minister Maliki and his clique of advisors were seeking to consolidate their grip on power through sectarian exclusivism. "You have to understand their mentality," he stated. "They (Iraq's Shi'as) feel they have been oppressed for 1400 years, and now their time has arrived. They are prepared to do anything not to lose this chance." Bringing Sahwa commanders into positions of authority in the ISF is not compatible with the mindset of Maliki and his advisors, Abdulrahman emphasized.

¶5. (C) Unless this course is altered, Abdulrahman cautioned, the reemergence of Sunni insurgency would be inevitable. Asked what he thought the U.S. and other powers should do to influence the situation, Abdulrahman suggested conditioning assistance, including the International Compact for Iraq, to the GOI's pursuit of non-sectarian policies.

¶6. (C) Comment: Abdulrahman, a Sunni Arab, stressed he was speaking for himself rather than the Vice President. We would place him on the liberal end of the Iraqi Sunni Arab political spectrum. His worry about the fate of the Sahwa and its implications are broadly held among Sunni Arabs. End comment.

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